

2003 Permitting Customer Satisfaction Survey Summary

This summer, DEM completed its second customer satisfaction survey of its major permitting programs. Approximately 1200 individuals, consultants, municipalities and individuals who applied for permits in FY 2003 were surveyed. The results of this survey showed that DEM was providing a good level of customer service with respect to its conduct in pre-application meetings, permit application review and overall effectiveness of the permit program. Table 1 below is a compilation of the survey results.

The Department of Environmental Management issues approximately ten thousand environmental permits during the course of a year. The Ombudsman conducted a survey in August and September of 2003 to assess the customer satisfaction of these permitting programs. This survey was based on a protocol developed by the Environmental Protection Agency for evaluating permitting programs.

The target of the survey was individuals or businesses that applied for permits in the last fiscal year. Not all permit types were surveyed. A statistical sampling of customers was used for this survey. A survey protocol was developed prior to the mailing and is available for review.

Table 1			
Permitting Program Survey Results			
Program	Pre-application Meetings	Permit Application Review and Determinations	Overall Satisfaction
Air	Very Good Service	Good Service	Very Good Service
ISDS	Average Service	Average Service	Average Service
Pesticides	N/A	Excellent Service	Excellent Service
Waste	Excellent Service	Excellent Service	Excellent Service
Water	Good Service	Average Service	Average Service
Wetlands	Average Service	Average Service	Average Service
Average of all Programs	Good Service	Good Service	Good Service

As can be seen above, customer satisfaction varied by program and DEM provided an average to excellent level of service in all programs. Although not all the program surveys represented a statistically valid sample, the survey results in 2003 show a general improvement trend. The most typical negative response indicated that the timeliness of many of the DEM permit process could be improved. Even though there were some timeliness issues with the permitting programs there was strong support for the function of these programs. Responses from five of the six programs rated the role of the permitting process in protecting the environment at the excellent to good service level.

The evaluation system in Table 3 was used to rate the programs. This evaluation system is similar to numerical values that were used in the 2002 survey. Customer satisfaction is an important issue at DEM. As a result, this evaluation system is rigorous and the standard for meeting customer satisfaction is set high. This survey will allow DEM to conduct an evaluation of its permitting programs and to continue the process of continuous improvement in its service to the public.

Table 3 Proposed Program Evaluation System	
Positive Response Rate	Service Provided
96-100%	Excellent service
91-95%	Very Good service
86-90%	Good service
80-85%	Average service
Less than 80%	Service needs improvement

The table below charts the changes from the two years. We need to be cautious when we interpret these results. The survey design had an 80% confidence level and a sampling error of $\pm 10\%$.

In addition, not all programs had a response rates that would be considered to be a statistical sample. The air program and water program had additional sub-programs added to the survey so the results may not be able to be compared in the two study years.

It is encouraging, though, that there were improvements in the ISDS and Wetlands Program survey results. In 2002, both programs were rated as needing improvement in all three program areas, i.e. pre-application meetings, permit application review and determinations and over-all satisfaction of the permitting process. The programs have improved to an average rating level. There was a significant improvement in the Pesticides program and the Waste Program maintained its excellent level of service rating.

